

## Cultivating Equity: Analysing Access to Quality Education for Tribal Students in Eklavya Model Residential School

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### Abstract

*In 1997–98, the Government of India (GOI) established the Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS), a residential education scheme to provide quality education to tribal children in remote areas of the country. This study focuses on the structure, governance, and resourcing patterns of EMRSs, especially the deployment of teachers, raising some equity concerns for the education of tribal communities. It also highlights flaws in the governance and resourcing patterns using cases of teacher recruitment, deployment, salaries and development in EMRSs. It further examines interstate and inter-district disparities, as well as differences in functioning between privately managed and government-managed schools, leading to inequalities. The study reveals how large-scale contractual teacher appointments lead to unequal teacher effectiveness, which significantly impacts student learning and affects the overall quality of education provided to tribal children compared to those studying in other government schools. The study highlights how the nature of appointment limits contractual and guest teachers to just being subject knowledge deliverers rather than contributing to the children's holistic development. The inequalities in teacher resourcing and student learning are further affected by the lack of coordination between tribal societies at the state and district levels. Besides, the directorates of education at the state level, through State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs), District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) and other central government initiatives, deprive teachers of professional development opportunities, which subsequently deprive schools of the benefits that would otherwise reach children. Thus, it impacts the curriculum quality, and subsequently, the overall quality of education, resulting in schools that merely follow circulars and norms. But they miss the spirit of learning, deepening the inequalities faced by tribal and marginalised children.*

**Keywords:** *Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs), equity, teacher resourcing, rationing of opportunities, tribal schools, governance*

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### Introduction

Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities are geographically and socially isolated from society, facing different types of challenges (Geddam, 2015). Across the country, it has been observed that children from marginalised communities receive unequal educational opportunities (OECD, 2010). This primarily relates to the limited availability of resources and amenities in rural areas that are predominately

tribal in makeup. Besides, these regions face inadequate teacher-student ratio, difficulties in using teaching staff, time constraints and issues with the quality of teaching-learning experiences. To ensure a level playing field for equal learning for all students, factors involving exposure to and accessibility of co-curricular resources and opportunities for holistic child development are crucial (Patra, 2018). To address inequities regarding access to education experienced by tribal children in rural areas,

residential schooling facilities, such as the Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs), are a significant step taken by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GOI. According to Kumar and Naseema (2018), residential schooling can boost performance, motivation, and learning by fostering an inclusive and a fair school culture. The EMRSs try to develop themselves into a system that addresses the achievement, motivation, and learning needs of millions of tribal children in the country.

This paper highlights some structural and governance concerns of schools managed by Tribal Development Departments in different states, especially EMRSs. It also points out a flawed understanding of equality, as demonstrated through the limited provisioning of school buildings and infrastructure, as well as the failure to ensure sufficient qualified regular staff and continuous training opportunities for staff development. Thus, it narrows the meaning of 'equality of opportunities' to availability of schools, and 'equality of treatment' to availability of learning resources and residential facilities.

Amidst the focus on learning outcomes that place the onus on individual teachers while downplaying the need for recruiting qualified and trained staff and for necessary inputs, such as a friendly learning atmosphere and quality education (Rampal, 2018), the paper questions the rationing of opportunities for tribal children and how schemes intended to reduce inequalities are, in fact, exacerbating them.

### **Understanding Equitable Quality of Learning Opportunities**

Equity provides resources that enable everyone to accomplish shared objectives. In simple words, while all students have the same expectations and goals, each of them require different levels of support to meet those goals. Ensuring that every student gets the opportunity for quality education recognises the intrinsic value of diversity and dignity of all individuals (UNESCO, 2016). According

to Schleicher (2014), students must be able to learn to their fullest without barriers in an equitable educational system. To ensure quality education for underprivileged pupils, it is imperative to have fair and inclusive resources at the school level. To provide equity in educational opportunities for all students to develop their potential—irrespective of socio-economic status, racial heritage, gender or any other factor—all of them must have access to quality education. Discrimination needs to be eliminated, and students must succeed at school based on their efforts and abilities. It helps improve opportunities for disadvantaged students and schools, benefiting both the education system and society.

This study examines policy and practice measures that promote equity and quality at the system and school level. Equity and quality education must be combined for a high-performing education system. It is important to adopt policies that promote equality and quality at the system and school level to ensure that every child has access to quality education. Improving educational opportunities benefits both students and communities. It is crucial to design equitable systems and paths across the education system, implement inclusive practices inside and outside the classroom, and allocate sufficient resources (equity priorities, resources, and goals) to achieve equity. Facilitating fair education for marginalised students would help make the society fairer, and reduce the gap between privileged and underprivileged students. An effective education system combines quality and equity so that most students can achieve high knowledge and skills (OECD, 2012). Schools with a higher percentage of underprivileged pupils face more challenges, leading to poor performance and ripple effects throughout the educational system.

The quality of leadership and teachers are the key players in transforming the performance of these schools. Qualified, trained, and skilled teachers need to be recruited. But their numbers are inadequate. Besides,

teachers hardly get any support from the authorities concerned to perform their role of change agents in tribal schools. Training programmes should offer foundational competence and expertise on handling issues encountered in schools, having pupils from disadvantaged sections of society, to increase teachers' capacity as those of change agents. Even though teachers significantly impact students' performance, schools for disadvantaged groups often do not have enough qualified teachers (OECD, 2012). Experienced and competent teachers are valuable resources for schools. So, the policies should encourage recruitment of qualified teachers in disadvantaged schools and conducting regular teacher training programmes.

### **The Context of EMRS**

This research explores the meaning of 'equality of opportunities' as observed in the structure, governance, provisioning, and functioning of the EMRS through the case studies of seven EMRSs in West Bengal. Realising the significant role that quality education plays in improving the living conditions of people, the GOI decided to dedicate the EMRS scheme for tribal students as a model school after the success of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs). The scheme aims to provide equitable, quality education to ST students in the upper primary and higher secondary stages of schooling. Tribal students, under the EMRS scheme, can benefit from reservations provided by the government and secure employment in public and private sectors and become change agents (EMRS Guidelines, 2020, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GOI).

### **Objective of the Study**

The study is aimed at exploring the nuances of how equality of opportunity is reflected in the governance, provisioning, structure, and functioning of EMRSs, as well as the function of school leaders in enhancing the overall quality of these school systems. The

study aims to analyse teachers' recruitment, qualifications and development in EMRSs, and how these factors influence equality in learning opportunities and overall learning.

### **Methodology of the Study**

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design to comprehensively gather and analyse field-related data, and blending qualitative and quantitative approaches for a nuanced understanding (Creswell, 2011). To explore the multifaceted dynamics of EMRSs in West Bengal, the research employs data triangulation strategy and enhances convergence validity by triangulating multiple sources and methods, including interviews, observations, school documents, and contextual analyses. Drawing from primary and secondary sources and engaging various stakeholders, this approach ensures a comprehensive examination of the subject through complementary perspectives (Greene, Caracelli, and Graham, 1989).

The primary data collection approach involved conducting in-depth interviews with a representative sample of EMRS administrators and key personnel across West Bengal. Purposive sampling guided the selection of participants based on their roles and responsibilities in the schools, ensuring a diverse representation. The interviews were semi-structured. Open-ended questions were asked to explore themes, such as school governance, educational practices, and challenges specific to EMRSs. A standardised school information schedule was also developed and used to gather quantitative data. This schedule included sections on student demographics, academic performance metrics, infrastructure details, staff profiles and community engagement initiatives, providing a comprehensive snapshot of each EMRS.

Districts with a substantial tribal population—Jalpaiguri, Bankura, Purulia, Paschim Bardhaman, Jhargram, Birbhum, and Dakshin Dinajpur—have EMRSs. The EMRSs cater to students from Class VI to XII.

Each EMRS has approximately 480 students. The analysis employed a mixed-method approach. Qualitative data underwent systematic classification, thematic coding and trend identification. Quantitative data were analysed using percentage analysis and tabulation to derive comprehensive insights into the functioning and impact of EMRSs. This robust methodological framework ensures a rigorous examination of the research questions, offering valuable insights into the educational landscape of tribal residential schools in West Bengal.

### About Teachers across EMRSs in West Bengal

Teaching and learning form the core of the education system, with teachers being the central figures in the educational process. A school's most valuable asset is its teachers. The need to have qualified teachers becomes even more critical in schools serving marginalised communities. In such cases, teaching transcends mere instructions and becomes a noble mission, aiming to integrate marginalised students as equal participants in learning. It, thus, requires teachers to possess empathy, understanding, sound content knowledge, professional skills, and dedication. The EMRSs aim to provide quality education to tribal students and address the educational disparities the children belonging to these communities face. So, the role of teachers in these schools is not just to provide academic knowledge, but to uplift and empower children. This is demonstrated through significant improvements in educational outcomes for tribal students, such as increased graduation rates and improved enrolment in higher educational institutions.

However, the ability of EMRSs to fulfil this noble mission is hampered due to the lack of regular recruitment of qualified teachers. For instance, in West Bengal, only EMRS-Satyabanpalli recruited a relatively higher number of teachers (44), with 12 (27.27%)

being contractual and 32 (72.72%) guest teachers. Across all EMRSs in West Bengal, approximately 60% teachers are contractual, 25% are guest faculty, and only 15% are regular. This heavy reliance on contractual and guest teachers, who often receive meagre salaries and per lecture compensation, undermines the stability and quality of education. The inadequate number of regular teachers compromises everyday school activities, leading to unfulfilled learning needs.

Additionally, 21% of the teachers, including regular employees, teaching in these EMRSs are not qualified or experienced enough. Some regular employees do not even have a degree in teacher education (B.Ed). Thus, the quality of education is significantly compromised. A research by Bennell and Akyeampong (2007) underscores the necessity of having a sufficient pool of qualified, motivated, and dedicated teachers for quality education. The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) prescribes that a secondary school, with more than two sections per class, should have at least five teachers for each subject to maintain a 40:1 Student Classroom Ratio (SCR). Despite this, there has not been more than four regular appointments in any EMRS across West Bengal, and EMRS-Satyabanpalli has no regular teacher. Without qualified regular teachers, even state-of-the-art buildings and facilities cannot ensure a high-performing education system.

To truly embody the noble mission of teaching in EMRSs, it is crucial to establish educational institutions and housing facilities supported by a stable, regularly appointed faculty. Such efforts must be carefully and methodically executed to ensure that these teachers are not just filling positions, but are dedicated to the holistic development and empowerment of tribal students. Only then can EMRSs fulfil their mission of providing equitable and high-quality education to the children of marginalised communities.



**Table 1: About the Teachers of EMRSs in West Bengal**

School name	Total No. of Teaching Staff	Gender		Appointment			No. of Untrained Teachers
		Male	Female	Regular	Contractual	Guest	
EMRS-Nagrakata	18	14	04	02	14	02	04
EMRS-Mukutmanipur	19	14	05	04	12	03	02
EMRS-Shushunia	21	21	00	03	14	04	00
EMRS-Raghunathpur	26	18	08	03	13	10	06
EMRS-Satyabanpalli	44	23	21	00	12	32	02
EMRS-Kankutia	21	16	05	03	12	06	13
EMRS-Kumarsai	17	14	03	01	12	04	00

Source: Field Notes, 2021

The gender distribution of teachers at EMRS-Shushunia and EMRS-Satyabanpalli highlights the feminisation of the teaching profession and how service conditions dissuade many from joining this noble profession. At EMRS-Shushunia, all 21 teaching positions are held by males, whereas EMRS-Satyabanpalli has a balanced distribution with 23 male and 21 female teachers. This disparity indicates how service conditions, such as lower salaries and job insecurity for contractual and guest teachers, deter women from entering and continuing the profession at EMRS-Shushunia. In contrast, a balanced gender representation at EMRS-Satyabanpalli, despite having similar conditions, suggests that local recruitment policies and gender norms significantly influence gender distribution. Besides, the feminisation of teaching is linked to the societal perception that teaching is suitable for women due to its alignment with traditional gender roles. However, there is a notable underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, such as principal and vice-principal. The gender-disaggregated data

reveal that men dominate regular teaching positions, which offer better job security and benefits, while women are predominantly found in less secure, lower-paid contractual roles. This trend reflects broader societal patterns where women are overrepresented in precarious positions, limiting their career progression and leadership representation. Furthermore, the status of teachers' residences on school campuses exacerbates these issues. Only 19% of the teachers live on campus, and merely three out of seven principals reside in their school. This situation compromises students' safety and security, and reduces teacher-student interaction time. Female teachers represent only 15% of resident teachers. For instance, in EMRS-Kankutia (five female teachers) and EMRS-Raghunathpur (eight female teachers), only female teachers reside on campus. This limited presence of teachers on campus restricts after-class student support, affecting relationship building and the overall learning environment. Consequently, the apparent equality of access and treatment among teachers and students is not genuinely equitable.

## Nature of Employment and Its Impacts on Teaching

The West Bengal TDD administers the management of EMRSs through the Paschim Banga Adibashi Kalyan O Siksha Parisad (PBAKOSP). There are three types of teacher appointments in EMRSs—contractual, guest and regular. The West Bengal Public Service Commission (WBPSC) uses a merit-based recruitment process to select regular teachers, which includes a written examination and an interview. Contractual teachers are hired by the District Level Committee (DLC) via a formal hiring process that involves the DLC identifying vacancies, posting job openings, screening applications, interviewing shortlisted candidates, and providing appointment letters that outline the terms of employment, including the length of the contract and salary. Guest teachers are hired to cover short-term and urgent needs.

The nature of employment in EMRSs across West Bengal shows significant diversity in appointment types and their impact on employees. The regular employees receive salaries according to the state government's current pay scale and enjoy related facilities. On the contrary, contractual and guest teachers receive a fixed

monthly remuneration with no associated facilities. This disparity in recruitment and remuneration affects teacher job satisfaction and motivation levels. Contractual teachers, in particular, struggle with lower pay, lack of related facilities and job security, which affects their commitment and undermines the overall quality of education. Furthermore, less housing facilities for teachers on school campuses exacerbates these issues as most teachers have to commute daily, limiting their availability to provide support to students beyond the school hours. The role of DLCs is crucial as they manage the recruitment process for contractual and guest teachers, and must ensure that the immediate needs of each school are met through local hiring and selection procedures (Karmakar, 2022).

## About the Heads of EMRSs

West Bengal has seven EMRSs. Two of them have regular principals, three have contractual principals and two are managed by teacher-in-charge or in-charge principal. The WBPSC makes regular appointments to EMRSs across the state. A district-level committee is responsible for managing each school as per the provisions of the EMRS. This committee is responsible for handing out contracts and making appointments.

**Table 2: A Snapshot of Heads of EMRSs in West Bengal**

School Name	Nature of Appointment	Academic Qualification	Previous Experience	Leadership Training	Continuous Professional Development
EMRS-Nagrakata	Contractual	B.Sc., M.Sc., B.Ed.	No	No	No
EMRS-Mukutmanipur	Teacher-in-charge	B.Sc., M.Sc.	Yes	No	No
EMRS-Shushunia	Teacher-in-charge	B.Sc. M.Sc. Ph.D.	Yes	No	No
EMRS-Raghunathpur	Regular	B.Sc. M.Sc. B.Ed.	Yes	No	No
EMRS-Satybanpalli	Contractual	B.Sc., M.Sc., B.Ed.	No	No	No

EMRS-Kankutia	Regular	B.A., M.A., B.Ed., M.Ed., Ph.D.	No	No	No
EMRS-Kumarsai	Contractual	B.Sc., M.Sc., B.Ed.	No	No	No

Source: Field Notes, 2021

A vice-principal is needed in these schools to ensure better management. But none of them have a vice-principal. Two principals serving in West Bengal EMRS do not have the necessary teacher training degree or qualifications. It must be noted that these tribal schools are managed by principals without residential school experience. The heads of EMRSs need professional development and training in leadership roles and other important areas to manage the schools effectively.

### Professional Development and Training

Professional development and training for teachers at EMRSs in West Bengal are notably deficient, with the School Education Department and the PBAKOSP of the TDD failing to provide in-service training or induction programmes. This shortfall is exacerbated by the lack of coordination between various educational departments and ministries, denying EMRS teachers access to training opportunities that are readily available to their peers in government schools affiliated with DIETs or SCERTs. Consequently, EMRS teachers and leaders often lack specialised training in curricula and pedagogy, which are crucial for creating a suitable learning environment for tribal students. In contrast, JNVs have more qualified and better-paid staff, clear career progression paths, and a National Leadership Institute that conducts regular in-service training for teachers and principals. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has established the National Educational Society for Tribal Students (NESTS) to address the recruitment, training, development, monitoring, and career progression needs

of EMRS teachers. But professional training and development programmes for EMRS teachers are irregular due to inconsistent recruitment criteria and processes that vary by state and management body. This inconsistency leads to continuous influx of untrained contractual and guest teachers, making sustained and progressive training for teachers and school heads nearly impossible. Effective school leadership is critical for ensuring quality education for all students. Head teachers and principals need training in leadership to be equipped to oversee curriculum planning, administer competency-based assessments, monitor and analyse student performance, and maintain student enrolment. School leaders must also understand their institution's strengths and limitations; motivate the staff regarding punctuality and attendance; and ensure availability, distribution and optimal utilisation of resources. Despite the non-tribal background of most EMRS teachers and their limited knowledge about tribal cultures and practices, no tribal sensitisation programme is carried out for them, hindering their ability to meet the basic learning needs of tribal students and creating a communication gap that further impedes effective teaching and learning (Karmakar, 2022).

### Cultural Disconnect between Non-Tribal Teachers and Tribal Students

The study highlights a significant cultural disconnect between non-tribal teachers and tribal students in EMRSs across West Bengal. It was found that most teachers, coming from different social backgrounds, lacked the experience of teaching in

residential schools for tribal communities, leading to insensitivity towards the unique challenges tribal adolescents face, such as language, culture and food. This disconnect extended to administrators, with a district official dismissively stating, “They receive food, a place to reside, books...what else do they need?”

Understanding tribal sociocultural backgrounds is crucial for effective management at EMRSs. Yet, many officers and teachers, predominantly from non-tribal backgrounds, lacked this awareness, limiting their ability to address tribal students’ issues.

Consequently, students felt detached from teachers, a problem exacerbated by the non-residential status of many teachers that left students’ belonging needs unmet and made learning difficult. Teachers are responsible for providing academic support to tribal students from impoverished socio-economic backgrounds. Although most tribal children learn Bangla or Santali in primary school, English is the language of instruction at EMRSs, creating a significant language barrier that 40-minute classes cannot overcome. Non-tribal teachers, unfamiliar with tribal cultures and languages, struggled to communicate effectively. The prevalence of non-residential, contractual and guest teachers with little acculturation further widened the gap. Prioritising hiring teachers with tribal backgrounds for matron and mentor positions could foster cultural sensitivity and a better understanding of the local community. Alternatively, teachers should undergo immersion programmes to understand the students’ cultural backgrounds better. Supervising teachers with limited experience in handling inequality and efficiency issues is challenging, given their roles in overseeing daily administration and participating in various school committees. Teachers must prioritise mentoring and coaching underachieving students and spend more instructional time with them. However, inadequate staff quarters make staying on campus less appealing than

living with families, making most teachers to commute daily. These structural deficiencies and infrastructure problems require urgent attention from EMRS management agencies to create a more supportive and culturally attuned educational environment for tribal students (CBPS, 2017; Karmakar, 2022).

### **Governance and Resources Allocation: Managing or Exacerbating Inequalities**

The importance of governance systems at various levels must be addressed for adequately managing education and guaranteeing equity and quality. To manage and govern EMRS, the GOI’s Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) operates through the National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTs), which is responsible for creating, endowing, administering, and regulating EMRSs across the country and addressing school system challenges and needs occasionally. The management of EMRSs is directly overseen by a DLC chaired by the District Magistrate (DM) and the state’s TDD. There is no provision in the EMRS guidelines for the constitution of school management committees (SMCs) or PTA/MTA, as recommended by the Right to Education (RTE) Act (2009). Hence, there is no decision-making body at the school level, except for some EMRSs that non-governmental organisations manage.

The DLCs play a pivotal role in the governance and management of EMRSs in West Bengal. Their responsibilities span various domains, including financial management, infrastructure development and academic support. Financial management involves allocating and monitoring funds, managing day-to-day expenditures and ensuring financial support for various school activities. The DLCs are also responsible for hiring contractual and guest teaching and non-teaching staff, and addressing staffing needs promptly. Besides, they develop and implement annual action plans, supervise and monitor school activities, and ensure



the safety and security of students and staff. Academic support includes offering assistance to meet the needs of students and supporting quality residential services.

Additionally, the DLCs facilitate community engagement by ensuring local aid and cooperation and addressing local needs to improve school resources. The DLCs consist of DM as the chairman, project officer-cum-district welfare officer (PO-cum-DWO, BCW TDD) as the member secretary, and members including Additional District Magistrate (ADM), Sub-Division Officer (SDO), Block Development Officer (BDO), a member from the local tribal community and the school principal of the concerned EMRS. This structure ensures a balanced approach to managing EMRSs effectively, focusing on meeting the needs of a tribal community and maintaining cultural sensitivity.

Furthermore, the governance structure must provide a platform for inter-ministerial collaboration or convergence, especially in school education. Unfortunately, the efforts made by the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education (MoE), and the GoI do not benefit students or teachers of EMRS. The MoE neither has a direct role, linkage or convergence with MoTA, nor has it made any effort for the indirect participation or extension of benefits of central government schemes and support system to EMRS, thus, leaving both students and teachers under MoTA to fend for themselves. While the EMRSs were set up looking at the success of JNVs, they could not develop the required governance structure, making it uniformly operational to remove the interstate disparities in the functioning of EMRSs across the country. The EMRS has a non-uniform governance structure across states that paralyse its smooth functioning in recruiting qualified teachers and the professionalisation of the entire school system. This contrasts with JNVs, which are centrally governed and examine teacher recruitment, management issues, and conduct regular induction and training programmes for teachers and principals. The

JNVs have regional offices with capacity-building and monitoring mandates and a National Leadership Institute (NLI) in New Delhi to strengthen the academic skills of their staff and monitor schools. In addition to collaborating with other academic bodies for capacity-building, it conducts regular training programmes for school leaders and teachers. It is going to be three decades since the EMRS establishment, it still needs such structures and human and infrastructural resources to sustain and lead these structures. However, collaboration with the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and other such premier educational organisations has made leadership and pedagogical training for school heads and teachers possible. In addition, some online training and resources are available to teachers through the National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers' Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA), as well as the development of online learning support, such as Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA). However, if there is no face-to-face orientation or training for teachers regarding EMRS, how aware they are remains to be seen. In addition to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 1994), teachers who receive more staff development opportunities are more likely to engage students in learning using a wide range of books and materials from other subjects. This was associated with higher student achievement. The NAEP-1994 reported that such curricular differences are widespread across the USA, and the achievement gap between white and minority pupils and between higher and lower socio-economic backgrounds is heavily influenced by these factors (Lee and Bryk, 1988; Oakes, 1985). Thus, the lack of a structure that supports provisions for professional development or little or no time scheduled for staff development are also an equity issue impacting learners' achievement and furthering their scope for economic success.

In addition, the EMRS has been governed by a top-down approach by the state bureaucracy under the direction of the TDD. As a result, individual schools still need to be connected to the decision-making structure of state-level school governance. Except for some schools managed by non-governmental organisations with their own SMCs and social and political networks that navigate bureaucracy, there must be a direct link or opportunity to break the bureaucratic channel or power at the school level to make decisions (Karmakar, 2021). Thus, a stark difference is seen in the functioning of NGO-managed schools and those that are without a management. While teacher appointment and development is an issue across all management types, NGO-managed schools can still make contractual or guest appointments, balance the PTR, and take school-level decisions through SMCs.

In schools directly governed by the TDD, in the absence of any kind of school-level committees, the principal is like an army captain who neither has the decision-making power to navigate through a situation, nor the training or expertise to win over it. Here, the principal is the helpless, lone leader who knows that one can neither leave the ground nor transform it. Due to dependence on DLCs for regular decision-making, the EMRS needs more effective planning and decision-making. For the TDD and DLCs, which are responsible for managing the EMRSs, education is just one of its numerous jobs in addition to projects for tribal community development and other duties of public administration. Therefore, there needs to be more emphasis on education. However, TDDs are governed by state governments and operate at their will. As a result, there is lack of leadership and decision-making, numerous vacant positions, appointment of contractual and unqualified staff, poor salaries, lackadaisical attitude towards tribal education, and lack of training programmes for teachers. This was evident through interactions with some of the functionaries. One of them said, "...this much is sufficient for them. These are first-generation learners,

getting two meals, a residential facility and an opportunity to educate...What else you expect?"

This attitude is reflected in how schools are governed and managed. It has been observed that marginalised and low-income students often need more access to quality education than those coming from privileged backgrounds who get it easily. These children need the necessary infrastructure and resources, and qualified teachers, support staff and principals. Ensuring equitable education quality to have the right leadership and management approach is crucial for an organisation's success (Murphy, et al., 2007). Access to schools is more than having a building or a few resources. It is also about having the same opportunity and receiving equivalent treatment regarding school access and the required facilities to ensure equal success for all students. Unfortunately, the structure and governance of EMRS lack both equality of opportunity in terms of qualified teachers, quality learning opportunities and equivalent treatment regarding access to educational facilities that their counterparts receive in different parts of the country (Karmakar, 2021).

## Discussion

Since Independence, the GOI has focused on guaranteeing quality education and equal access to educational opportunities to all students. It even framed the RTE Act in 2009. But due to inadequate educational opportunities and poor academic achievement, many continue to long for receiving quality education. Schools and schooling facilities must be accessible to ensure equity and quality of education. This would be possible only by ensuring teachers for every subject in primary and secondary schools. Besides, inadequately qualified teaching staff affect the treatment of students from tribal communities. Evidence from several countries reveals that contractual appointments hurt

motivation and social status (Stromquist, 2018). Students' learning is influenced by their competence and commitment (Bennell and Akyeampong, 2007). According to Barber and Mourshed (2007) and Leithwood and McAdie (2007), teachers play a pivotal role in students' learning. Teachers' ability, motivation, morale and preparation determine how well they teach. According to research, teacher motivation significantly affects teacher efficacy (VSO, 2002), and teacher efficacy influences the teaching-learning process more than teacher competence (Upmanyu, 2016). The study argued that teachers' levels of ownership of their recruitment policies and facilities are highly related to their job satisfaction. Therefore, appointing teachers with an improved salary structure and other facilities, such as incentives, is of utmost necessity. The study found that teaching in schools, such as EMRSs, is challenging, especially if a contractual or guest teacher is expected to improve the educational outcomes in a mere 40 minutes without addressing the students' basic physiological and belongingness needs. Following the redesign and reform of the system of education, policymakers believe that fundamental changes will lead to the practice of teaching (Ball, et al., 2011). Without structural support that acknowledges and promotes teachers' significant role as human resources, the school system cannot address its quality challenges. Effective teacher education and training (both pre-service and in-service teachers) is crucial for producing competent teachers as it affects the overall quality of instruction. It also helps in the development of individuals, communities and countries.

## Conclusion

The secret to development is education. This also applies to tribal communities. Tribal communities are experiencing slow development owing to their poor educational status. Their condition can only be improved by bringing out fundamental changes. It is also crucial to focus on enhancing student learning outcomes, which can only be achieved by hiring teachers having adequate training and expertise. According to the RTE Act 2009, untrained and underqualified teachers are not permitted to be employed. But such contractual appointments are made even in government schools. Moreover, step-motherly treatment is meted out to students and teachers, who have to work in poor and professionally draining work environments. Policies that ignore teacher sentiments create a highly demotivated workforce that negatively affects learning outcomes (Kembhavi, 2011). To create opportunities for fair, inclusive and lifelong learning for all, it is crucial to have trained staff and invest in them, if the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-4) are to be met. A sustainable, culturally enriched future must be ensured for all children by ensuring that they obtain the necessary information and skills. In other words, teachers contribute directly to achieving five of the seven Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-4) targets through their conviction, vision, knowledge and actions as frontline leaders (Sarangapani, et al., 2021). It is also essential to have a common centralised administrative structure for EMRS, like the JNVs, that looks into recruitment, induction and professional development of teachers, as well as school admissions and assessments, not leaving it to the whims and fancies of the states and their respective tribal departments and district magistrates, for whom education may be just one of the many tasks at hand and maybe the least important.



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